

Kenyans Celebrate U.S. Presidential Inauguration January 20, 2009

Kenya celebrated the inauguration of their new President Tuesday night. Well, Barack Obama was really being sworn in as the President of the United States President, but you'd never know it from the cheering that erupted in impromptu gatherings throughout the country, including a gathering of 400 students, teachers, artists and journalists who watched the proceedings at the Public Affairs Officer's residence.

Via the seeming magic of big screen TVs, Public Affairs Nairobi managed to add another 400 excited participants to the throng on the Mall last evening at the Public Affairs Officer's residence. Over 200 students from ten high schools and nine universities joined another 200 education, cultural and civil society contacts in cheering as President Obama took the oath of office AND then mentioned in his speech the small village where his father was born. President Obama's pointed references to dealing with the realities of economic crisis in the U.S. and his calls on the strengths, hopes and ideals of the American people that had brought him to the White House and which would restore America's standing in the world were not lost on the Kenyans.

In conversations between the Americans and Kenyans present, people reflected on how the Obama's points on the need for Americans to re-shoulder the mantle of greatness were mirrored in the economic and political turmoil in Kenya. They wondered where the spirit of Americans from its founders through its immigrants, past and recent, to its newly awakened youth, could be found among Kenyans to deal with its own constitutional reforms and corruption issues.

The Embassy program, while a culmination of the programs we had run to educate Kenyans about the US electoral process (with the obvious parallels to their own) prior to the November 4 election, now serves as the starting point for a new embassy speakers program on the peaceful political transition, the realization of the American ideals of equality and the rule of law embodied in the Constitution and brought to fulfillment through the Civil Rights movement that will carry us through Black History Month and Women's History Month.

The Inauguration program was complemented with art, song and poetry created specifically for the event in response to a U.S. Embassy competition to express *Unity Through Diversity*. The performances and the artwork that graced the tents added immeasurably to an incredibly moving and motivating evening.

The Dipnote blog is available for comments on the Kenyan celebration of the Inauguration. Read the article here: http://blogs.state.gov/index.php/entries/kenyans_celebrate_inauguration/